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ABSTRACT

Addressing the growing interest in qualitative research methodology, the paper describes the process and results of a team evaluation of a college day-care center. The purpose of the study was twofold: to conduct research which would provide team members an opportunity to develop skills in qualitative research methods and to assess the child care center's student teacher program. The five-member team first met with the coordinator of the center to establish the means of conducting the study, after which an abstract of the proposed study was presented. During the next three weeks team members engaged in proposal writing, methods study, or initial site visits. Fieldwork was conducted for the next five weeks. The physical and human settings of the center were documented and the roles of the lead teachers and currently placed student teachers were assessed. Interviews with present and former student teachers, with the center's coordinator, and with academic personnel were also conducted. Next, team members investigated data to identify central patterns, and compiled a list of recommendations based on relevant anthropological theory. Recommendations included suggestions for making student teachers feel less exploited and isolated, for more formal structures in determining the student teacher's role, and for easing the burden of lead teachers. The author concludes that the team approach is valuable for in-process sharing and for accomplishing more in less time. (KC)

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CONTRACT ETHNOGRAPHY: A TEAM DOCUMENTATION APPROACH TO EDUCATIONAL EVALUATION[1]

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Contract Ethnography: A Team Documentation Study

Introduction

This paper and the study which it details exist because of a current and growing interest in qualitative research methodologies. This edition is evidence of that interest in the anthropological community, as was the day-long Conference on Educational Evaluation which preceded the 1978 Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association. But sociologists, psychologists and others involved in evaluation, have also begun to attend to the contributions which qualitative methodologies can make to their endeavors. (Sherlock, 1979). I can offer anecdotal evidence of this phenomenon by my current employment as a Research Fellow at the University of Minnesota's Measurement Services Center. Though the principal staff persons at the Center have been and continue to be psychologists, their interest in evaluation has repeatedly led them to seek out the adjunct services of persons trained in the ethnographic approach.

It was in order to prepare myself for such potential employment and, not incidentally, to have an in-hand study to corroborate, substantiate and otherwise fortify my position as an applicant, that I participated last spring (1978) in a class on anthropological field method in educational evaluation. The class constituted itself as a research team and proceeded to conduct an ethnographic evaluation of a child care center. In this paper, I will summarize some parts of that study, especially the team process of documentation and analysis, and then I will suggest what I think are the implications of such a study for anthropological research.

The Child Care Center

Capricorn, a child care center affiliated with a private urban college, provides year-round day-long care for children from approximately 100 families from the college community including students, staff and faculty. It is divided into four distinct sections, each section having a Lead Teacher who is responsible for staffing, for coordination of activities and for parent conferences. In addition to the Lead Teacher, each section has two Assistant Teachers who are in charge whenever the Lead Teacher is absent or occupied, and several part-time staff necessary to meet state and federal requirements for teacher-child ratios. The Lead Teachers are answerable to the Center's Coordinator, who in turn reports directly to the Office of the President, the same office which provides the Center's funding.

The organizational structure originated with the College's Board of Trustees, and their original mandate to the Center was a significant factor in the initiation of our research.

The Evaluation Contract

Because Capricorn's mandate from the Board of Trustees requires that it serve as a research and training resource, their response to our request that we use the Center as our field site was a positive one. We asked the Capricorn staff to select an aspect of their program which they would like to see us focus on in our research. They identified the presence of student teachers as a

major concern. The Center had been serving as a field placement center for student teachers. Because part of its charge from the Board of Trustees is to serve as a model facility in all its functions and because the number of student teachers to be placed at the Center was expected to more than double in the coming year, the staff asked us to investigate its field placement program. Specifically, they asked us to provide them with information that would enable them to maximize the role of student teachers in the general functioning of the Center. Thus, we began our research with clear and specified goals: first, to conduct research which would provide the members of the team with an opportunity to further develop their skills in the application of qualitative research methods and, secondly, to assess Capricorn's field placement program.

The Documentation Process

The research team consisted of five field investigators and a field director. The field director was an associate professor of anthropology and education. Of the five field investigators, three were advanced students who had considerable experience in doing field work, and two were beginners, graduate students in education with an interest in ethnographic evaluation.

In March of 1978, the entire team met with Capricorn's Coordinator. By the end of that brief introductory meeting, we had an idea of what the staff's interests were in relation to our study, and they had an idea of how we would be conducting our

research. During the following week, we drafted an Abstract of the proposed study which three of the team members presented at Capricorn's next weekly staff meeting, i.e., Lead Teachers' and Coordinator's meeting, for their information and comments. The Abstract included the names and titles of our team members (see Note 2), the purpose of the study as we saw it, a brief description of the methods we would use, including participant observation, structured interviews and document review, and a time line for reporting our progress and our conclusions.

During the following three weeks, advanced and beginning team members took different roles engaging in three separate activities: proposal writing, methods study and initial site visits. A full proposal for the study was drafted by the experienced team members. It included a statement of objectives, a rationale, and a discussion of the significance of the research. It identified some of the specific information which would be sought concerning four different aspects of the Center's program, viz. its physical patterns, formal structure, ideological patterns and daily behavior. The proposal concluded with a schedule for data collection and had appended to it a bibliography of potentially relevant sources regarding both method and theory. While the experienced team members were preparing the proposal, the inexperienced members were reading ethnographies of education and listening to lectures about anthropological field methods. In addition, they were engaging in mini data collection exercises. Simultaneously with the above activities, all team members made

at least one visit to the child care center in order to observe, to be observed and just generally to begin to become familiar with the field site. The proposal was then presented to and accepted by the Center staff, and data collection began in earnest.

The fieldwork was conducted primarily during the four to five weeks between April 24 and May 22. During that time, approximately 180 person hours were spent on data gathering and related field analysis. Each team member was assigned, by a process of consensus, to accomplish one of five different data collection tasks. First, several fieldworkers were assigned to document the physical and human settings of the Center through observation, informal discussions and attendance at a staff meeting. A second part of the methodology called for detailed investigation of the roles of the Lead Teachers and the currently placed student teacher. To accomplish this, one fieldworker was assigned to shadow each of the teachers and to note the observable daily patterns including the kinds of work done, other activities engaged in, interactions with children, staff and others, and communication processes utilized. These detailed observations were supplemented by a third aspect of the methodology--an open-ended interview about the field placement program to be conducted with each Lead Teacher. For the fourth and fifth aspects of the documentation, a 3-person team of interviewers was assigned to contact and interview present and former student teachers and a single investigator was assigned to contact

and interview the Center's Coordinator and the several academic personnel who were responsible for placing and supervising the student teachers.

The interviews were planned jointly by all of the team members who would be conducting them. Separate sets of questions were developed for each of the three sets of interviews; i.e., student teachers, Lead Teachers and academic personnel, but the basic subjects for investigation were held constant across all interviews, and the sequencing of questions was so designed as to provide maximum coverage of all areas potentially relevant to the study. This level of quality and consistency was maintained by having each interview team submit its questions to the field director and then meet with her to make whatever revisions seemed necessary. Quality control was further ensured by having each fieldworker submit his/her initial field notes from either observations or interviews to the field director who then reviewed them first for detail, secondly for referencing items, such as consecutive numbering of lines and pages and a page-by-page index of contents, and thirdly for strict avoidance of inferences. This process was repeated once more towards the end of the fieldwork period.

Following each experience in the field, the fieldworker summarized his/her notes, made pertinent but sparse initial analyses, and appended whatever other comments seemed warranted or interesting. These summaries were then copied and distributed to the full team. The team held weekly data review and analysis

meetings in order to determine which, if any, areas needed further research and how best to accomplish it. Because this initial data analysis revealed antagonisms between student teachers and Lead Teachers, the team decided to conduct a second set of in- epth interviews with each of the Lead Teachers, focusing this time on their job responsibilities rather than on the placement program. We also decided to shadow an Assistant Teacher as we had the Lead Teachers and student teachers. We needed to find out and document whether or not Lead Teachers were over-worked, as we suspected they were, thus making supervision of student teachers just one more burden, and were there other personnel, viz. Assistant Teachers, who could, if necessary, take on more responsibility.

When we were satisfied that we had completed enough field-work to proceed with a final analysis, we divided into teams to comb different sections of the entire body of data for the purpose of identifying central patterns. Patterns were identified separately for each role in the program, i.e., Lead Teachers, student teachers, Coordinator and placement personnel, and for each analytical level, i.e., behavior, beliefs and values. The actual process involved the making of lists. E.g., the category "Student Teachers' Beliefs about Expectations" was culled from the data and under it we listed every detail from raw field notes which was clearly in that category. Once the lists were made, and there were approximately fifty such categories across all roles, topics and levels, each team member was assigned a number of them to

write up in paragraph form. The field director used the written summaries to construct a descriptive ethnography, and those findings became the basis for the final phase of our research, that of evaluation.

Each team member independently developed a list of recommendations which were suggested by the data as it was interpreted in the light of relevant anthropological theory. These recommendations were presented and discussed at a lengthy (8 hour) session from which we emerged with a complete and uniform set of recommendations for the Capricorn Child Care Center. The final set of recommendations was based on Homan's study of social groups (1950) and Gearing's of cultural transmission, as well as Turner's (1970) interpretation of Rites de Passage.

Summary of Findings and Recommendations

Our final activity as a team was to meet again with Capricorn's Coordinator in order to make whatever exit statements seemed required, and to present him with our report and recommendations. What follows is a summary of that report.

Our data indicated that for each entering student teacher the Center was like a "foreign" country populated with more than a hundred strangers. First impressions of constant activity lacking reason or order began to dissipate when the students met and observed the Lead Teacher. However, the students quickly perceived, as we did, that their cooperating teachers would have little time for supervising student teachers.

Most former students felt that Capricorn's child care program was a good one, but their views of the teacher placement program were generally less positive. Although most felt that they did learn, most also identified a series of problems: One was a lack of clarity about what was expected of them at the Center. Though specific assignments, such as preparation of lesson plans, were clear, the expectations regarding how they were to function in the day to day setting were not. In addition, it was their belief that evaluation and feedback lacked regularity and were not sufficient to provide support and adequate information about their progress. Their belief that the Lead Teachers neglected them led them to characterize themselves with such terms as "exploited" and "treated like aides." Some felt "isolated," like "outsiders."

Lead Teachers agreed with the students that they had too many demands on their time and said that they had two jobs, one with children and one administrative. From our observations and interviews, we constructed the following picture of Lead Teachers. They are responsible for keeping the Center clean, quiet, safe and interesting and for directing the care of the physical, mental and emotional needs of the children. Over half their day is spent in this work. In addition, the Lead Teachers are responsible for parent conferences, curriculum planning, maintenance, emergencies, supplies, research activities, policy development, and staff supervision, including scheduling, hiring and firing. They nevertheless reported that they liked their jobs because they did

have responsibility and because they were helping children at a critical period in the life cycle.

When reflecting on the student teacher program, Lead Teachers felt that they had provided students with adequate evaluation, but would have preferred having specified standards on which to base their evaluations. The teachers were unanimous in recommending that student teachers should be viewed as learners at the Center. As such, they felt the students should not be included in the child-staff ratio because that could result in the inclusion of incompetent and unwilling students, such as they had encountered in the past, in the ratio of supposedly competent staff.

Interviews with academic personnel responsible for placement of student teachers indicated general satisfaction with the Center as a placement. Individual interviewees did identify some problems, generally those already mentioned here.

The research team's recommendations were based on their findings that the program was adequate but needed considerable work before it could become the model program the CCCC desired. Recommendations centered around the improvement of organization and the creation of positive sentiment about and within the teacher training program.

In regard to the student teachers, the team recommended that the Center take steps to create positive student perceptions by distributing a handout that would provide solid information about its policies and philosophies. We determined that specific data

about the CCCC's egalitarian distribution of "chores" needed to be presented to help avoid having students feel like "aides."

In order to increase communication with Placement Offices, and thus create a positive image of the CCCC among students, it was recommended that the Coordinator use the expected enlargement of the student teaching program as a reason for suggesting joint preparation of a Handbook for Student Teachers.

Using Rites of Passage theory (Turner, 1970) to interpret student anxiety, the research team recommended the establishment of a formal orientation as a vehicle for channeling student anxiety toward performance of their learning tasks and thus transforming it from a free floating destructive force into a positive force.

To help establish a good progression and increase student-Lead Teacher interaction and liking, regular, formal weekly evaluations were recommended with major evaluations, using a standardized form developed or adopted by CCCC, occurring at the fifth and tenth weeks. Use of such a form was seen as alleviating evaluation tension for both student and Lead Teacher.

Because student interviewees had indicated discomfort with too much freedom at the Center, the team recommended a formalization and statement of heretofore informal expectations. This was seen as potentially providing a guide for students and an evaluation aid for Lead Teachers. It was also recommended that students meet formally with individual Lead Teachers during their first week on the job to contract with them about methods of

fulfilling requirements and expectations. It was our judgment that such formalization could help control anxiety. Again making use of Rites of Passage theory and Gearing's (1977) learning theory, the team recommended that the early week of lead teaching be eliminated to create a gradual progression and a sense of accomplishment and progress for students. The team also recommended the addition of a requirement for students--that they be required to attend area staff meetings. Citing Homans (1950), the full report pointed out the manner in which the engendered increased interaction would lead to greater student and staff satisfaction.

Finally, it was our judgment that an informal structure complementary to the above recommended formal structures should be created for the purpose of relieving student anxiety. Specifically, we recommended that each student be given an "ami(e)" to orient them and provide continued friendship and support. It was recommended that Assistant Teachers be given this non-teaching, non-evaluative role, thus providing students with a much needed sounding board (Gearing, 1977) and center point for interaction (Homans, 1950). We recommended that the formal and informal structures meet through the vehicle of a Coordinator's Coffee at the end of the quarter, thus providing students with a sense of closure and accomplishment.

The second set of recommendations focused on the Lead Teachers and their role in the Center. All the data pointed to the fact that Lead Teachers were overburdened. Again utilizing Homans'

theory, coupled with Herzberg's (1966) Motivation-Hygiene theory, the team indicated how this had led to decreased interaction with student teachers. This, in turn, had increased negative sentiment in student teachers, a sentiment which was communicated to staff and which resulted in an accelerating downward spiral of negativity. In order to break this spiral, it appeared to us to be imperative that Lead Teachers be freed up both psychologically and actually to undertake the increased interaction and activity with students that could lead to positive sentiment. It was recommended, therefore, that Lead Teachers shift aide schedules slightly to arrange a 45-minute lunch break. Further, student teachers should have their work schedules arranged to fit the Lead Teacher's convenience as is done in many other programs. In addition, we recommended that a Lead Teacher station be established in all four areas so that teachers could work at the administrative portions of their jobs without having to give up supervisory responsibility or be replaced in the ratio. Also, it was suggested that some minor administrative tasks be taken over by aides as it is uneconomic in the long run to use teachers for these tasks.

The final recommendation advised holding in-service workshops for Lead Teachers on the topic of student supervision. It was our belief that increased professional development would contribute to building a model program and help raise Center prestige in the eyes of its professional audiences.

Implications for Future Research

The puzzles and problems which appear when ethnographers take on evaluation tasks have been discussed repeatedly since the issue was first raised by the proponents of "action" ethnography (see Hymes and others in Reinventing Anthropology, 1972). Though compromises may certainly be required, as Clinton (1976) has suggested, in order to produce an ethnographic evaluation, that evaluation is not necessarily antithetical to the anthropological tradition of relativism, nor does it necessarily require that the fieldworker become as actively involved in the field setting as are the informants. Though judgments are made and communicated, they are deferred until the ethnography is completed. Holism and relativism continue to direct the research process until the data are in and patterns are analyzed. The paradox here is that the rigorous process of doing ethnography facilitates, in the end, a more authentic evaluation than those traditional, goal-related evaluations which have been prepared by formal evaluators. But the question really is not any longer whether to do evaluation. (See Wolcott, 1975; Everhart, 1975, 1976 and Clinton, 1975, 1976 for that discussion.) It is being done. The immediate questions are how to proceed.

The documentation project which I have described in this presentation suggests some of the advantages as well as some of the problems which occur when the evaluation is conducted by a team of researchers.

Team approaches are most valuable for the in-process sharing

which necessarily occurs. Typically in the academic and scientific communities, a scholar conducts a study, completes the analyses, and then presents the results to a community of peers at a conference or in a journal publication. Only after the work is completed, or at least well under way, are the insights of others available. But team research allows, indeed requires, each member to critically consider the work of all other members at each step in the process. If I am writing inferences in my field notes, such as "two of the teachers were quite angry," every other member of the team has some personal investment in assisting me to revise my habits and write down the markers or behaviors which led me to make that inference, such as "two of the teachers sat nearly immobile with arms and legs tightly crossed, teeth clenched, lips pursed and eyes glaring." In general, team members become adept at helping each other question preformed or otherwise unfounded conclusions.

Secondly, team studies are valuable training experiences for junior researchers. In addition, if the untrained personnel can conduct the easier but necessary tasks of data collection, they can be trained and monitored in a lesser amount of time than it would have taken senior personnel to do the work themselves. It is generally more economical, therefore, to use less experienced personnel on such data collection tasks as mapping, count sampling and structured interviews. (See Dobbert, 1978).

Other kinds of time constraints can also be relieved by the team approach. If there are only three months, for whatever

reason, in which to complete a study, but there are four persons on the research team, they can produce 12 months of output in one-fourth the time. However, the type of data gathered from a 12-month study is different in quality because it is based on a longer term acquaintance. On the other hand, the introduction of multiple viewpoints may compensate for the loss of the time perspective.

This seesaw of trade-offs is what we will continue to see as we watch and contribute to the development of ethnographic evaluation. And it will be evident not only in terms of the team approach, but in other aspects of our research as well, including such things as contract evaluation, the use of population surveys, and the general inclusion of additional psychometric and sociological methodologies.

NOTES

1. An earlier draft of this paper was presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, Los Angeles, California, November 14-18, 1978.
2. The following are the Project Personnel who participated in the collection, analysis and presentation of the data upon which this study is based:

   Gayle Anderson, Education Graduate Student, Ph.D. Program in Curriculum and Instruction.

   Marion Lundy Dobbert, Associate Professor of Anthropology and Education, Department of Foundations of Education.

   Joanne Moeller, Education Graduate Student, Ph.D. Program in Home Economics.

   Steve Sherlock, Education Graduate Student, Department of Foundations of Education.

   Rosemary Smith, Coordinator of Educational Anthropology, Science Museum of Minnesota.

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